

AN AMAZING SPELLING TRICK

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One of the most mysterious of all spelling tricks with cards, not well known today even to magicians, was invented by the American magician Howard Adams. He published it in his now rare 1984 booklet with the strange title OICUFESP (Oh, I see you have ESP). Since then it has appeared with slight variations in several others books. I urge you to get a deck of cards and astonish yourself by following these instructions.

Remove from the deck any five cards and their mates. A mate is a card of the same value and color. For example, the Queen of Hearts is the mate of the Queen of Diamonds. Call the five cards ABCDE and their mates abcde. Arrange the cards in the order ABCDEabcde. Place the packet on a table and cut it one or more times. Hold the packet of ten cards face down and deal five cards to form a pile, thereby reversing their order. Put the remaining five cards face down to form a pile alongside the cards just dealt..

Now you are going to spell the words in the phrase “Last two cards match.” Pick up either pile and spell the letter L, the first letter of “Last,” by moving one card from the top of the pile to the bottom. Replace the pile on the table alongside the other one. Again, randomly select one of the two piles. Pick it up and move a card from top to bottom to spell A. Replace the pile, then pick up either pile to spell S. Do the same for T.

You now have two piles face down on the table. Remove the top cards of each pile. Without showing their faces, put the face-down pair to a vacant spot on the table, one card overlapping the other.

Repeat the random procedure for selecting a pile and spelling T, then W and O. After spelling TWO, again remove the top cards of the two piles, and place them aside, face down, near the pair previously put aside.

In the same way randomly select piles for spelling CARDS and MATCH. After each spelling of a word put the top cards of the two piles to one side, face down by the other pairs.

Two face-down cards remain on the table. Turn them over. Surprise! In spite of all the random choices, the cards match! The prediction, “Last two cards match,” has been fulfilled.

Is the trick over? Not by any means. There is a second climax even more astounding. Turn over all the pairs you placed aside. Each pair consists of matching cards!

The trick rests on subtle combinatorial principles. Of course other words can be substituted for the four in the prediction provided they spell with 4,3,5,5 letters, or those numbers with 5,4,3,2 added to them to make words with 9,7,8,7 letters. Do you see why?